DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 200 083 HE 013 545

AUTHOR Green, Kenneth C.; King, Margo R.
TITLE The Cooperative Institutional Research Program: A National, Regional, and Institutional Perspective of Trends in Higher Education.
SPONS AGENCY Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek, Mich.; National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Feb 81
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the College Board Western Regional Conference (San Francisco, CA, February 22-24, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Freshmen; Comparative Analysis; Educational Trends; Geographic Regions; Higher Education; Information Utilization; *National Surveys; Occupational Aspiration; Political Attitudes; *School Holding Power; Social Change; State Universities; *Student Attitudes; *Student Characteristics; Student Financial Aid; Student Recruitment
IDENTIFIERS *Cooperative Institutional Research Program; *United States (West)

ABSTRACT

The results of the 1980 Freshman Survey, which is part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), are summarized, and trend data concerning students enrolled in colleges in the western states and in the nation are examined. Among the findings of the 1980 Freshman Survey are the following: grade inflation in the nation's high schools is leveling somewhat; growing numbers of women continue to express strong interest in traditionally male careers; student political beliefs are moving toward the center from the left; and more students are making use of financial aid programs, particularly the Basic Grant and Guaranteed Student Loan Programs, to help cover the costs of going to college. Additionally, data on admissions indicate that roughly four out of every five students were admitted to at least two colleges. It is suggested that students in the western states are different in some ways from their counterparts elsewhere largely because of the structure of higher education in this region and the dominant role of the public sector. With regard to subject area interests and career aspirations, students in the West are very similar to students in other parts of the country. A project that involves institutional applications of CIRP data, specifically within the context of recruitment and retention concerns, is briefly described. This project, a consortium effort of eight private colleges in Southern California, uses CIRP data to develop a freshman class profile to improve student recruitment and retention. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Kenneth C. Green
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED200083

THE COOPERATIVE INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAM: A NATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE OF TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION[1]

Kenneth C. Green
Higher Education Research Institute

Margo R. King
University of California, Los Angeles

Each year more than 1.5 million students enter college as full-time freshmen. Approximately 300,000 of these students enrolled in over 600 colleges and universities nationwide participate in one phase on a continuing empirical study of American higher education, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, aka the CIRP.

The CIRP is a national longitudinal study of American colleges and universities. Established in 1966 by the American Council on Education (ACE), the CIRP is currently sponsored by both ACE and the University of California, Los Angeles, and receives some financial support from the National Institute of Education. Over the past 14 years the CIRP, under the direction of Alexander W. Astin, has assembled data on more than 4 million college students, some 100,000 faculty, and over 1,000 colleges and universities. In addition to the annual freshman survey familiar to many of you, CIRP also conducts periodic follow-up studies of college students as part of a continuing study of the impact of college on student interests, values, and personal and career development.[2]

HE013545

1. Paper presented at the 1981 College Board Western Regional Conference, San Francisco, February 22-24, 1981. This work was supported in part by grants from the National Institute of Education and the Kellogg Foundation.

2. A short list of recent studies based on CIRP follow-up surveys includes the following books and monographs: Two books by Alexander W. Astin, Preventing Students from Dropping Out (Jossey-Bass, 1975) and Four Critical Years (Jossey-Bass, 1977) plus several studies conducted by Lewis C. Solmon and his associates, College as a Training Ground for Jobs (Praeger 1977), College Education and Employment (College Placement Council, 1979), and The Characteristics and Needs of Adults in Postsecondary Education (Lexington Books, 1981).

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

While the project was designed to be a longitudinal research program for the study of American higher education, it is also a major source of current information about the attitudes, behaviors, experiences, and goals of the nation's college students--a sort of "social indicators" device for American higher education. The annual freshman survey, statistically adjusted to represent the nation's annual class of entering full-time college students, tells us a bit about what is happening in our high schools, what will soon happen in our colleges, and what may likely happen in the labor force some four to six years hence. The source of all this information is the CIRP student questionnaire with its 150-200 questions about background characteristics (including parental education, occupation, and income), educational aspirations and career goals, and personal opinions on various educational, social, and political issues.

The following presentation is divided into three sections: First, a brief summary of the results of the 1980 Freshman Survey (just released earlier this month); second, a look at some trend data to see how, if at all, students enrolled in colleges in the Western states differ from their counterparts nationwide; and finally a brief discussion of how CIRP data can be utilized as part of the institutional effort to plan for the enrollment crunch anticipated over the next fifteen years.

The 1980 Freshman Survey

Let me start by summarizing the results of the 1980 freshman survey, the fifteenth in the series:[3]

* grade inflation in the nation's high schools is leveling a bit.

3. Astin, A. W., King, M. R., and Richardson, G. T., The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1980 (Los Angeles: University of California, 1981).

* growing numbers of women continue to express strong interest in traditionally male careers.
* student political beliefs are moving toward the center from the left.
* more students are making use of financial aid programs, particularly the Basic Grant and Guaranteed Student Loan Programs, to help cover the costs of going to college.

Additionally, the 1980 results indicate that parental incomes are rising, no doubt reflecting the impact of inflation, and despite the move toward the political center among college freshmen, there have been both liberal and conservative trends on specific social and political issues in recent years.

The continuing influence of the women's movement is clearly evident in student attitudes and aspirations. Among 1980 freshman women, better than one in four (27.2 percent) is planning a career in business, engineering, law, or medicine. This figure is at an all-time high; it is up about 2 percent from last year and it reflects a tremendous increase--better than 400 percent--since 1966 when only 5.9 percent of freshman women expressed such career interests. (As a side note, the percentage of men interested in these careers has remained virtually unchanged since 1966, hovering around 48 percent.) These changes in the career interests of women have been accompanied by changes in student attitudes towards the role of women both in the home and on the job: the traditional view that "the activities of married women are best confined to the home and family" receives less support among college freshmen than ever before (26.6 percent, down slightly from 1979 and down from 48.7 percent in 1970) while support for equal pay and opportunities for advancement for women is expressed by better than nine students in ten (93.3 percent, up from 81.3 in 1970).

Educators at all levels have been concerned about grade inflation. According to the 1980 survey, high school grade averages appear to be leveling-off: for the second year in a row grade averages failed to show the regular increases that had characterized the previous ten years. Yet while grade inflation may be slowing down, high school grades are considerably above those of a decade ago. Whereas students with C averages outnumbered those with A averages by better than two-to-one in 1969 (32.5 percent versus 12.5 percent), C averages are now less common (only 19.7 percent) than A averages (20.8 percent). Although the majority of students agree that "grading in the high schools has become too easy" (59.7 percent in 1980), growing numbers of freshmen expect to enjoy continued academic success while in college: better than 40 percent feel that their chances for earning a B average in college are very good (compared to 23.6 percent in 1971), and better than 10 percent expect to graduate with honors (compared to 3.7 percent in 1968). At the same time, however, one freshman in five anticipates some need for remedial work while in college, most likely in mathematics.

Political beliefs among college freshmen are moving from the left to the moderate center. Well over half of the 1980 freshmen (60.0 percent) describe their political beliefs as being "middle of the road," while the proportion who describe their beliefs as either liberal or far left has dropped to 21.7 percent in 1980, down from 36.6 percent in 1970. The proportion of far right and conservative students has remained fairly stable during the past decade, running between 15 and 18 percent. And although liberals still outnumber conservatives, if only slightly in this year's freshman class, the increase in the proportion of moderates has come at the expense of the liberal and left-leaning students. Yet these political labels can be misleading as the decline in the proportion of liberals has been accompanied

by liberal trends in student views on specific issues, including the use of busing to achieve racial balance in the schools, federal responsibility to control pollution, and the previously cited changes on the women's issues.

Despite inflated parental incomes, more freshmen are using federal aid programs than ever before. About one-in-five (20.9 percent) now has a Guaranteed Student Loan, a substantial increase over 1979 (13.2 percent) and double the percentage reporting GSLs in 1978 (10.4 percent). The dramatic increase in GSLs no doubt reflects in part the removal of income ceilings for loan eligibility two years ago. However National Direct Student Loans (NDSLs) and college loans are also up, if only slightly, in 1980. The proportion of students receiving Basic Grants (BEOGs) has also increased in recent years, again reflecting in part the influence of the expanded eligibility created by the Middle Income Assistance legislation in 1978. This year, 35.1 percent of all freshmen have Basic Grants, up from 21.1 percent four years earlier.

Finally, perhaps of special interest to this group, some data on admissions. Nationwide, three of every four freshmen report that they are attending their "first choice" college in 1980, a figure that has been fairly stable for the past seven years. In 1980, 61.3 percent of full-time freshmen report that they applied to two or more colleges, down a bit from the high of almost 63 percent in 1978, but still up from the level reported in 1972 (at approximately 52 percent). Roughly four out of every five students were admitted to at least two colleges, perhaps reflecting the tendency of students to apply to more colleges and/or changing practices on the part of institutions concerned about enrollments. This last figure has been fairly stable for the last three years, but is up dramatically from 1972, when only 59.7 percent of all entering full-time freshmen were admitted to two or more colleges.

Comparison of National and Regional Trends

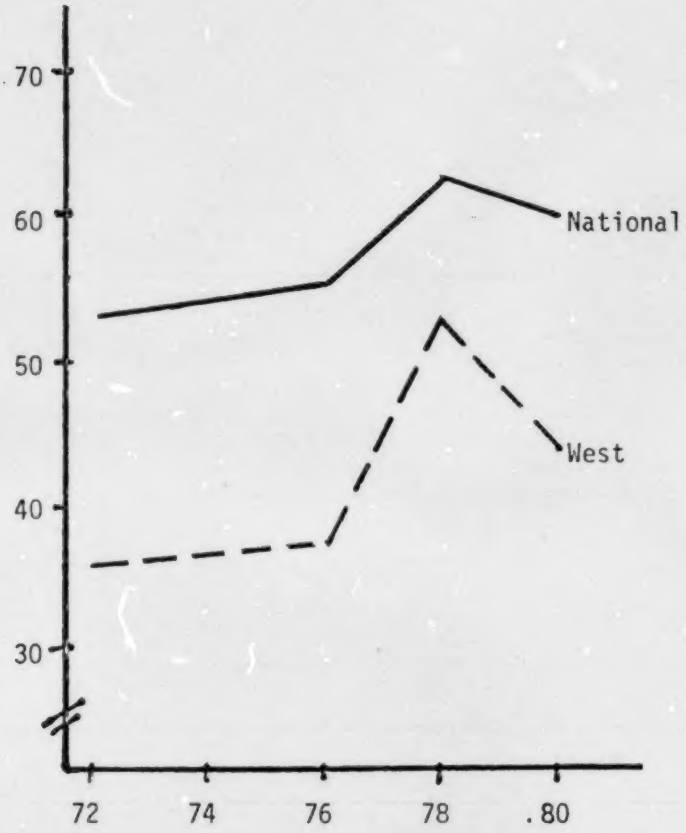
Higher education in the West is different from other parts of the country. We have more two-year colleges and fewer private institutions than the other regions; the role of public higher education is much different here. The CIRP data reveals some interesting similarities and differences about students enrolled in colleges in this region, as compared to their counterparts nationwide.

First, what I would call the Sunset Magazine view of the West on education and income. Sunset Magazine reports residents of the Western states are better educated and have higher incomes than their counterparts elsewhere in the country. The 1980 freshman survey suggests that this is not the case, at least as it applies to the parents of college students. There are no appreciable differences between the income levels and educational attainments of the parents of students attending college in the West as compared to parents nationwide. The proportion of families earning over $15,000 and over $25,000 is virtually the same in the West as it is nationwide (about 62 and 40 percent, respectively). The percentage of parents who either attended or completed college is also about the same (for fathers, about 47 percent attended and 35 percent graduated; for mothers, 38 percent attended and 23 percent graduated).

What does the CIRP admissions data reveal about freshmen in the West? Freshmen in western colleges are less likely than their counterparts elsewhere to apply and be accepted at two or more colleges; they are more likely to be enrolled in their first choice college (see Figures 1 and 2). The application and admissions figures reveal substantial differences between students in the West and elsewhere. In 1980, roughly 45 perent of freshmen in the Western states applied to two or more colleges, compared to almost 60

FIGURE 1

PERCENTAGE OF FULL-TIME FRESHMEN WHO APPLY TO TWO OR MORE COLLEGES, 1972-1980.

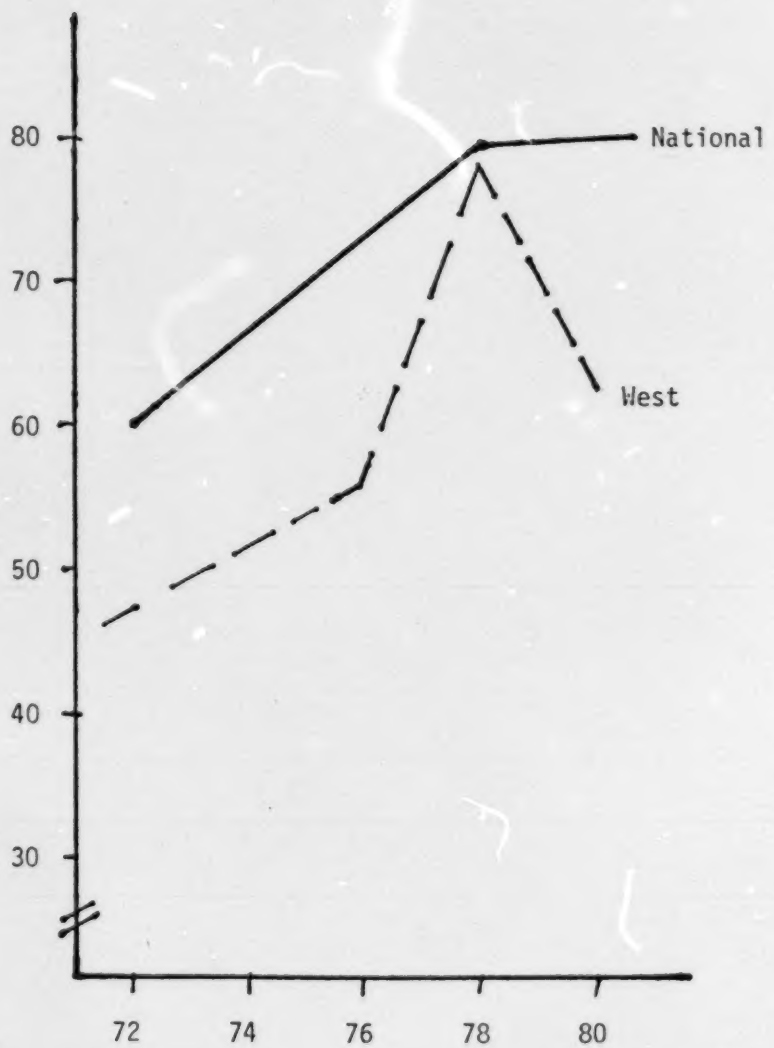


SOURCE: Cooperative Institutional Research Program, Freshman Survey Data, 1972-1980

FIGURE 2

PERCENTAGE OF FULL-TIME FRESHMEN ADMITTED

TO TWO OR MORE COLLEGES, 1972-1980.



SOURCE: Cooperative Institutional Research Program, Freshman Survey Data, 1972-1980

percent of full-time freshmen students nationwide (Figure 3). These differences probably are best understood in the context of higher education in the West: more open admissions public institutions, more community colleges, more states with stratified systems in which admission to a particular kind of institution is determined by well-publicized admissions criteria and credentials (test scores and grades, as in California). As there are fewer private colleges in the West, and because the public institutions have fairly-well established admissions requirements, students may confront less "risk" in the college admissions process; there is less uncertainty about the likelihood of being admitted to a particular college, particularly a public college, then elsewhere in the country.

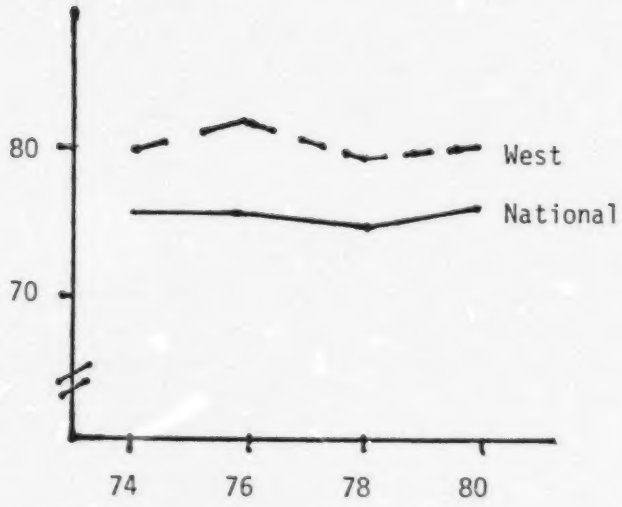
The CIRP data reveals that high school grade inflation is more prevalent among students enrolled in colleges in the West, although the region appears to be moving closer to the national norm after a big leap upward during 1977, 1978, and 1979 (Figure 4). At the same time the likelihood of a student on a western college campus indicating some need for remedial work while in college is slightly lower than for students elsewhere, as is student expectation of earning a B or better average. Students in the West agree in equal proportion with their counterparts nationwide that "grading in the high schools is too easy."

The dominant role of low-cost public higher education in this region would lead us to conclude that students in the West are less likely to participate in certain financial aid programs. And indeed, the CIRP data indicates this to be so (Figure 5). While the regional trend in Basic Grant participation runs parallel, if slightly below the national trend, students in the western states apparently have not taken advantage of the changes in GSL program eligibility to the extent of their counterparts elsewhere. While

FIGURE 3

PERCENTAGE OF FULL-TIME FRESHMEN ENROLLED

IN FIRST CHOICE COLLEGE, 1974-1980.

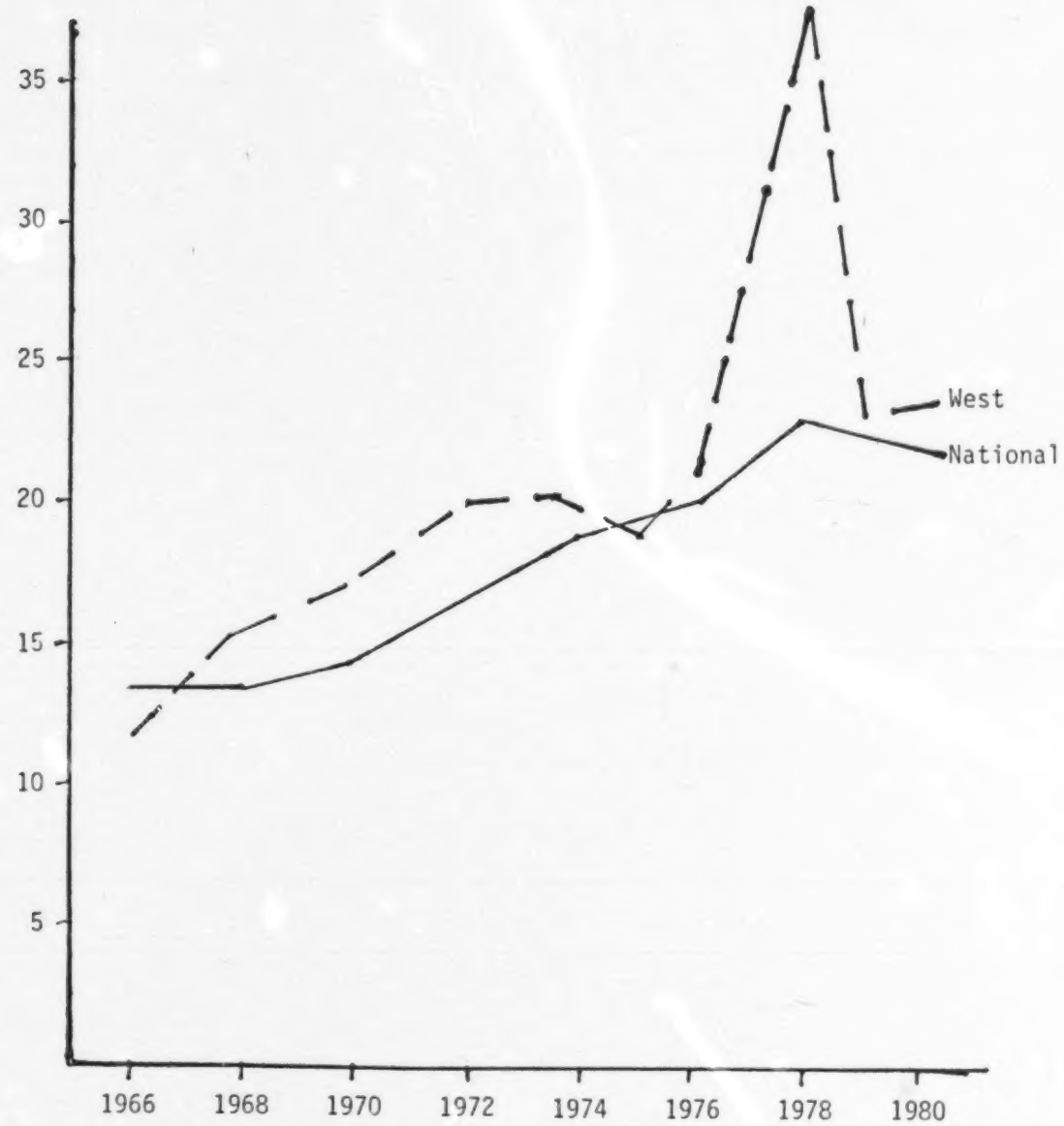


SOURCE: Cooperative Institutional Research Program, Freshman Survey Data, 1974, 1980.

FIGURE 4

HIGH SCHOOL GRADE INFLATION AMONG FULL-TIME COLLEGE FRESHMEN, 1966-1980

(percentage reporting A/A- grade average)

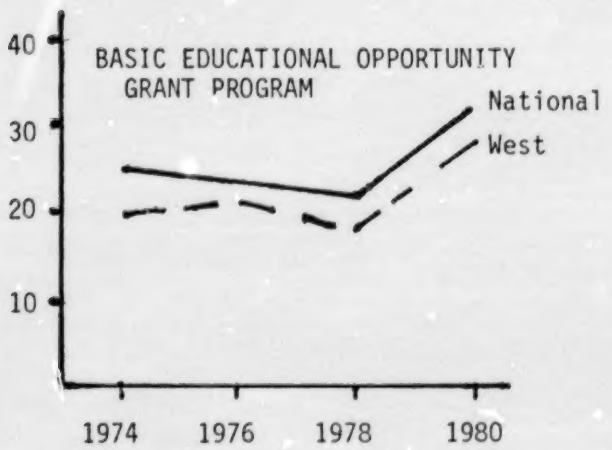


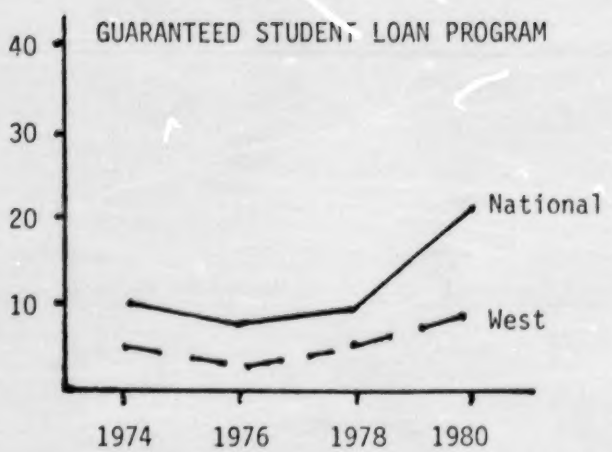
SOURCE: Cooperative Institutional Research Program, Freshman Survey Data, 1966-1980.

FIGURE 5

FRESHMAN PARTICIPATION IN FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID PROGRAMS, 1974-1980.

(percentage of full-time freshmen participating)





SOURCE: Cooperative Institutiona Research Program, Freshman Surveys, 1974-1980.

GSL participation nationwide doubled between 1978 and 1980, it increased only about 30 percent in the West.

Much has been made of the changing subject area interests of college students during the past decade. We know that students are less interested in the humanities and education and more oriented towards those majors that are likely to have a direct application to employment. Regional preferences for college majors mirror the national trend (Figure 6): Business and engineering are up, the health professions have been holding steady, while education, humanities, and the sciences have declined.

Finally, a look at regional differences in the career interests of freshmen women: Are things different in the West? The CIRP data indicate that the career interests of women in the West are identical to those of freshmen women elsewhere. There has been a major decline in the proportion of women interested in careers as school teachers, accompanied by a dramatic increase in the proportion of women aspiring to careers in business (Figure 7). Also significant is the increase in the proportion of women interested in careers in law and medicine.

In sum, we find that students in the western states are different in some ways from their counterparts elsewhere, largely, we suspect, because of the structure of higher education in this region and the dominant role of the public sector. Yet with regard to their subject area interests and career aspirations, students in the West are very similar to students in other parts of the country.

An Institutional Perspective

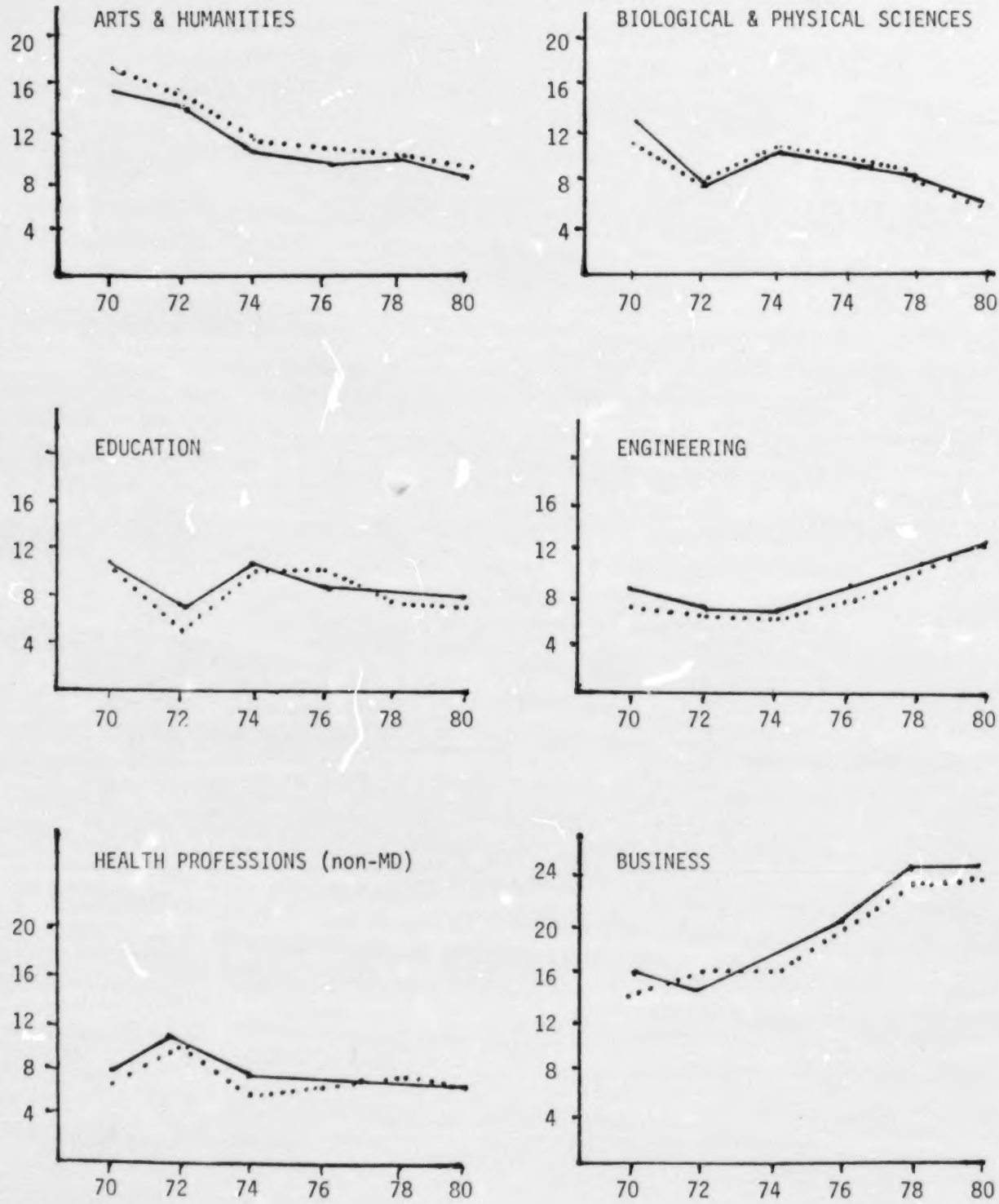
One of the problems associated with gathering data is using it in a meaningful manner. What do you do with the printouts, charts, and graphs

FIGURE 6

TRENDS IN PROBABLE MAJOR AMONG ENTERING

FULL-TIME FRESHMEN, 1970-1980

(percentages)



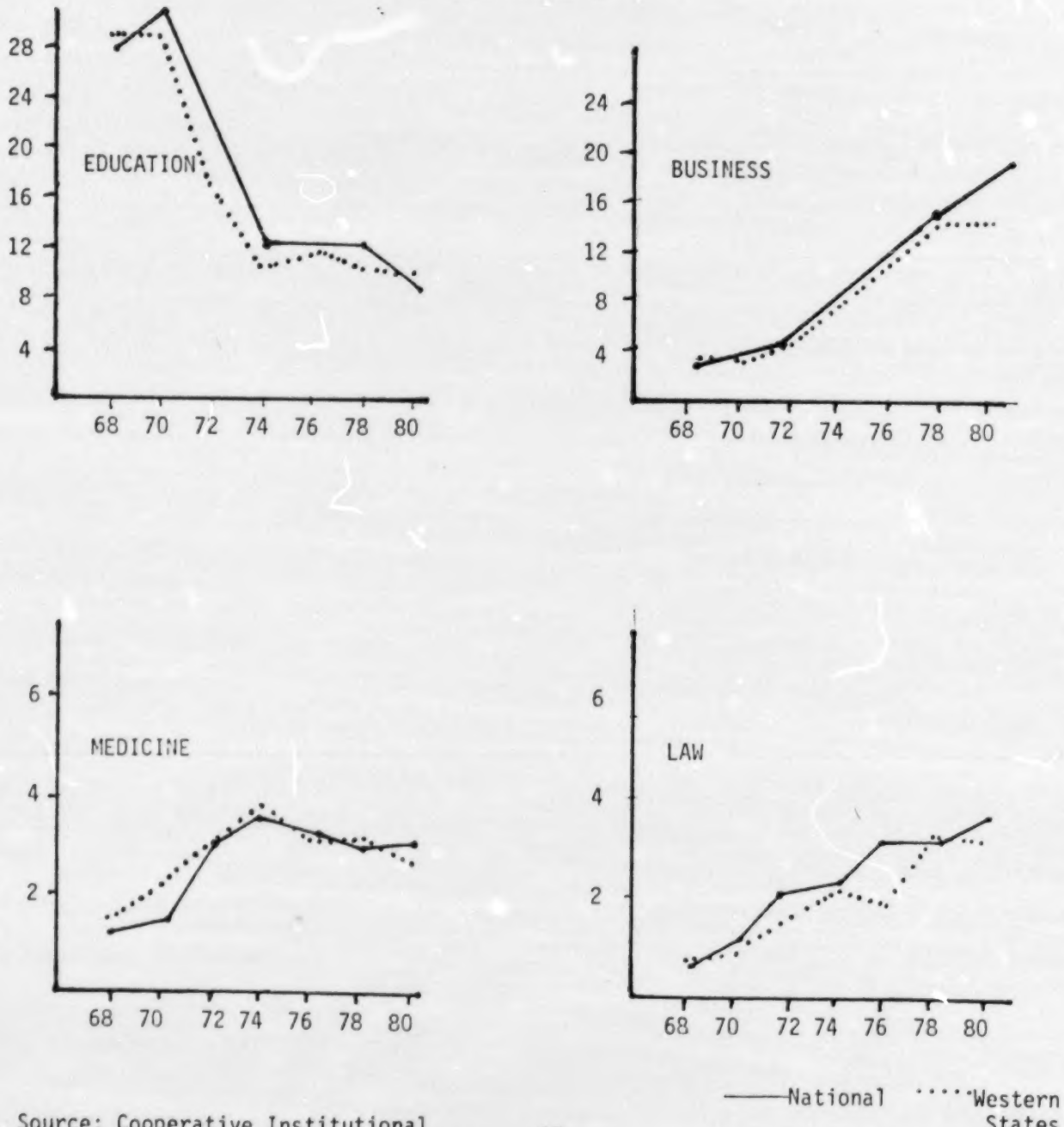
Source: Cooperative Institutional Research Program, Freshman Surveys, 1970-1980.

FIGURE 7

CHANGES IN THE CAREER INTERESTS OF

FULL-TIME FRESHMAN WOMEN, 1968-1980

(percentages)



Source: Cooperative Institutional Research Program, Freshman Surveys, 1968-1980.

once you have them? And how do you distinguish the meaningful from the meaningless? Let me take just a few moments to describe a project which involves institutional applications of the CIRP data, specifically within the context of recruitment and retention concerns.

Admissions and student affairs are no longer a peripheral part of the institutional operations; rather, they are offices that have a direct impact on institutional survival. Focusing on admissions, if the admissions team fails to recruit enough students, or, just as serious, recruits the wrong kinds of students, enrollments drop and the financial health of the college is threatened. More time is spent these days monitoring the pool of applicants: the number of requests for application materials, the number of completed applications, and the percentage of admitted students who eventually matriculate. Careful monitoring may suggest certain options and strategies which could enhance recruiting activities and retention programs; it can also flag trends that may have an adverse effect on enrollment.

Concern about the enrollment crisis has led eight private colleges in Southern California to organize a consortium to develop retention programs.[4] The consortium effort is funded by a grant from the Kellogg Foundation and the consortium uses the professional services of the Higher Education Research Institute in Los Angeles. This is an action project, a direct attempt to improve educational practice and institutional productivity. A key component of the consortium effort involves assembling and then utilizing data.

Many of the consortium institutions have or are in the process of using their CIRP data to develop a freshman class profile similar to the

4. The participating institutions are Azusa Pacific College, Chapman College, Harvey Mudd College, Loyola Marymount University, Mount Saint Mary's College, Pitzer College, Scripps College, and Whittier College.

one for "Acme University" presented in Table 1. The applicant pool at Acme looks pretty good. The 1980 freshman profile indicates that 85 percent of the freshmen say that Acme was their first choice college. The majority of Acme freshmen applied to two or more colleges and more than 80 percent could have attended another college if they wanted to do so. The data suggest that the vast majority of freshmen at Acme are there because they want to be, not because they did not have an option elsewhere. The 15 percent for whom Acme was not the most preferred institution represents a potential pool of drop-outs: Acme's ability to retain these students will depend upon the experiences these students have during their first weeks and months at Acme. The satisfied student may stay, while others may decide to transfer elsewhere.

From the moment they enter, some students know, or at least feel, that they will either drop-out or transfer. The freshman profile for Acme indicates that the percentage of students who feel they are very likely to drop-out or transfer is relatively low, and has been declining over the past six years. Were these percentages high, say about 15-20 percent, it would flag a real problem in the area of recruitment and retention.

The freshman profile indicates that the high school grades of Acme students, like students elsewhere, reflect the impact of grade inflation. Further digging reveals that Acme students are more likely to anticipate some need for remedial course work than students in other colleges, a point of interest to the English and math departments.

Let us assume that Acme is concerned about declining enrollments and wants to expand its recruiting activities. Where might it look for new pools of students? The freshman profile reveals that the majority of Acme freshmen--65 percent in 1980--live within 50 miles of the college. Another good proportion live within the 100-500 mile range. Yet the percentage who

TABLE 1

ACME UNIVERSITY

PROFILE OF ENTERING FRESHMEN, 1974-1980

(PERCENTAGES)

		1974	1976	1978	1980
I	APPLICATIONS AND ADMISSIONS				
	ACME FIRST CHOICE COLLEGE	81.8	89.4	86.9	85.6
	ADMITTED TO TWO OR MORE COLLEGES	N/A	80.2	81.2	81.5
	APPLIED TO TWO MORE MORE COLLEGES	N/A	56.1	63.4	65.4
II	STUDENT ESTIMATES OF TRANSFER AND DROP-OUT				
	VERY GOOD CHANCE OF TRANSFERRING	10.8	7.3	6.6	5.9
	VERY GOOD CHANCE OF DROPPING OUT	1.8	1.2	1.1	0.9
III	HIGH SCHOOL GRADE AVERAGE				
	STUDENTS WITH A/A- AVERAGE	52.5	53.1	62.7	57.4
IV	DISTANCE FROM HOME TO COLLEGE				
	LESS THAN 10 MILES	N/A	18.2	16.0	15.3
	11-50 MILES	N/A	53.4	51.4	51.0
	51-100 MILES	N/A	8.5	10.5	10.4
	101-500 MILES	N/A	14.3	16.9	18.5
	MORE THAN 500 MILES	N/A	5.6	5.4	4.7

live in the 50-100 mile range is relatively small, about 10 percent. Focusing some attention on the pool of potential applicants in this last group--those who live in the 50-100 mile range--might be a very cost-effective strategy. Additional contact with students and high schools in this area might increase both applications and enrollees. The data helps to identify a potential pool of applicants perhaps previously overlooked.

These are obviously simple examples, yet they illustrate a point. The institutional freshman profile is a rich source of information that can be used for institutional research and planning. Concerned about shifting subject and career interests of entering students? The CIRP data can help identify the trends. Are the math and English departments worried about staffing remedial courses? The institutional profile reports the percentage of freshmen who think they will need some remedial work in these areas. Concerned about the success of outreach efforts to attract minority students? Again, the data can be found in the institutional profile.

A more sophisticated use of CIRP involves the development of an "early-warning" system to identify potential drop-outs and help them with academic and personal problems before they make ultimate decisions to drop out of college. This involves linking freshman survey data with other information and periodically monitoring student progress. Many of the consortium institutions are thinking about developing such systems.

Finally, and without meaning to sound like a sales representative for the freshman survey, let me conclude by saying that the CIRP is an invaluable resource for monitoring national, regional, and particularly local changes in student interests, goals, experiences, and expectations. It need not, and

should not, be relegated to the seldom consulted file of internal reports and self-study documents. Rather, the CIRP is a source of rich data which can and should be used for assessing the past and planning for the challenges of the future.